DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 103 526 UD 014 893

AUTHOR Shanker, Albert
TITLE Speaking Freely.
PUB DATE 15 Sep 74
NOTE 40p.; Interview of Albert Shanker by Edwin Newman on WNBC-TV (New York City, Channel 4, September 15, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Activism; Community Control; Educational Finance; *Educational Needs; Educational Planning; Educational Policy; Educational Problems; Ethnic Groups; Governance; *Politics; *Public Policy; School Community Relationship; *Teacher Associations; *Teacher Militancy

ABSTRACT

In this interview, Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers of New York City, executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, and vice president of the AFL/CIO, discussed such topics as the following: his participation in a meeting of labor leaders with President Ford on September 11; the potential influence of teachers if they were organized; the intention of the government to handle the current crisis by maintaining a hard money policy; the deterioration in the quality of education over the last four or five years; the sort of social progress which could be brought about by teacher action; the limitations of collective bargaining as an instrument; the prospect that a teachers' union or unions will be able to do what he'd like them to do without a merger between the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA); attacks on public education, the dissatisfaction with the public schools among, not only middle class people, but among working class people who feel that the schools don't do for their children what they ought to do; community control; the prospect of a merger for your own purposes and teachers' own protection between the A.F.T. and the N.E.A.; and others. (JM)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ED103526

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SPEAKING FREELY

GUEST: ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

HOST: EDWIN NEWMAN

SPEAKING FREELY WNBC-TV CHANNEL FOUR SEPTEMBER 15, 1974 1:00PM

UD014893

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EDWIN NEWMAN: Hello. I'm Edwin Newman. Speaking Freely today is Albert Shanker. Albert Shanker is President of the United Federation of Teachers of New York City, Executive Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers. He is also Vice President of the AFL/CIO. Mr. Shanker, you are quoted recently as saying that teachers in this county were powerless, that they'd never been consulted by a President on any major issue. How, you were in on a meeting with President Ford on the 11th of September, a meeting, one of his series of economic meetings and at this one, labor leaders were invited. Did he consult you or were you able to tell him anything you wanted to say?

ALBERT SHANKER: Well, I did have an opportunity to contribute twice to that discussion and it probably was the first time that a leader of a national teacher organization--I wouldn't

exactly call it consultation--but had some sort of input into national policy. I don't know how much that meeting or all these summits are actually going to shape national policy. But I think that when you see--there are three million teachers in the United States of America. That's a force which, if it were organized would be larger than the teamsters or the oil workers or steel workers or any other group of employees that could possibly be imagined. And; furthermore, the impact of that group is very great because it's an educated group: it has a little bit more time, a little bit more money than other groups. It's a group that's able to use the language and it's also a group that's geographically distributed. It's in every state and every election district.

NEWMAN: But before we talk about the potential influence of teachers if, as you say, they were organized--incidentally. I thought they were organized, that's another point we ought to get to--but you weren't consulted, you said; well, what did you say? Were you talking about education or were you talking about the economy?

SHANKER: Well, two things--I spoke on two issues--the first of them had to do with the effects of the government's tight money policy on education and here I pointed out two areas. One, of course, is the very obvious thing that a teacher who's not a poor worker in our society, who's middle class, middle income, as a result of the tight money policies is certainly

out of the market in terms of home purchases and that's become impossible.

But that was, however, a secondary point to the effect of these interest rates on schoolboards and on state and local governments. Schools and cities and states borrow money. In New York City the Board of Education, the City of New York borrows money on a month by month basis in anticipation of federal and state funds that will be coming in later.

Now, that money used to be available at something like four percent interest since these are tax-free notes. That has shot up within the last year or so that the rates are about eight percent on city loans. And that essentially means that in one city, what's true of New York is true in a somewhat different way for Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles and it's true for the states of this country. For some recent bond issues that were floated by the city of New York there will be an extra six hundred million dollars of interest paid over the next ten years and for a short term loan there will be something like a hundred and seventy million dollars--just in this year alone.

Now, essentially, what that means is, that here is a hundred and seventy million dollars that will be spent on interest payments this year rather on services to children within our public school system and what I--I turned to the President and said--if we can grant loans to the Soviet Union at six percent to buy wheat and to buy other commodities, why can't we grant loans to the cities of this country which are in such desperate need

of the same six percent and Why can't middle income wage earners in this country still buy a house at six percent interest.

NEWMAN: Was there an answer?

SHANKER: No. He took notes and nodded and later on there was a point where Mr. Asch went through the budget and said that the Administration intended to cut five billion dollars from the budget and the reason was that we somehow had to put a halt to this growth of the budget year after year after year. And many of the labor leaders commented on some of the fallacies in the Administration program, but I particularly turned to the section which showed what we are now paying for welfare costs and Medicaid, unemployment insurance, food stamps--twenty-five billion dollars a year was being spent on Americans whom our society had failed; we hadn't educated them enough or provided them with sufficient skills, or other things: and as a result, the rest of our citizens were paying twenty-five billion dollars a year to support this group. And I raised the question as to what strategy we were applying in a budgetary way to see to it that that twenty-five billion would not increase in the future. Why don't we have programs for young children, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten years of age? Why not invest enough money during that early childhood period so that tremendous welfare burden which is increasing will be reduced in the future?

So that, essentially, there was a relationship between the

question of inflation, the question of jobs and the question of education.

NEWMAN: You were complaining about two things, really. You were complaining about the high rate of interest, which is not a direct matter in the field of education. And you were complaining that the Government doesn't appropriate enough money for educational purposes or doesn't put the money where it ought to be put.

SHANKER: Well, not only that but that the Government intends to--well, the Government essentially intends to handle the current crisis by maintaining a hard money policy which has a bad educational effect in that it reduces the ability of cities and states to provide educational monies since they have to spend more money on interest.

NEWMAN: You said, the Administration intends to maintain the crisis. When(?) you mean that, that the Administration--

SHANKER: Well, so-so-

NEWMAN: --wants to do this?

SHANKER: Well, so-so-they intend--let me put it this way--they intend to continue the policies of the Nixon Administration which so far has not worked. I'm not an economist. But I know that if you try(?) high interest and hard money and budget cutting and vetoing various social welfare bills over a period of five, six, or seven years and as each year goes on the rate of inflation goes higher and higher and the unemployment situation is worse

and worse, I'm not an economist but I know that if I did that and the results got worse and worse I would certainly look for a new plan.

NEWMAN: Is school-building down, for example--because of the high rate of interest?

SHANKER: No. School-building is down because there's a decline in the birth rate and therefore we--while we do need buildings at some different places, there are some neighborhoods where there's now an older population and they don't have children so that there'll still be some school building programs, basically, the school building program is down because of the change in birth rate.

NEWMAN: Is the amount of money that is being spent on education down? In terms of constant dollars?

SHANKER: The amount on education is down only very slightly. It's about the same, has been about the same over the last four or five years. Now, there have, however, been inflationary crunches within education. In almost all of our school systems, we used to have classes for so-called normal children or children without special problems that were up around thirty, thirty-one, and thirty-two. And then we had classes, perhaps twenty, with twenty-four children in the class or eighteen for children with special problems. Now what's happening over the last four and five years is that almost all the special services have been wiped out. Children who are very far behind are also in classes with thirty-two children in a class. The ratio of guidance counselors, that is--

NEWMAN: You're talking now about New York City or generally?

SHANKER: This is true, generally, on a national basis. There has been some deterioration in the quality of education over the last four or five years. And now, of course, we face very new problems in that the school population is declining. A very large number of teachers are being produced by the colleges. As a matter of fact, there are one and one half million students now enrolled in colleges who say that they expect to be teachers which means that at the end of the decade we could have two teachers for every available job. It would be a very--very new situation in our history. Certainly, it would be the only time one could go back and think of something similar to that would be the Depression of the 30s.

NEWMAN: That could, obviously, Mr. Shanker, be ruinous to union activity. But I was surprised to hear you say, as yet often say, if teachers were organized. Are they not organized? What's the American Federation of Teachers? What's the National Education Association?

SHANKER: Well, there are over three million teachers in the country. The National Education Association has about one point four million. And the American Federation of Teachers has four hundred and forty thousand. And there's an overlap of two hundred thousand in that group. So that, actually, one-half of all the teachers in the country do not belong to either national organization at a time when the policies of the Federal

Government are all important to the future of what will happen to public schools in the country. So that they are not well-organized and many who are organized within the National Education Association still do not accept the idea of collective bargaining for teachers. Many of them are still in organizations that are, I guess, along what we used to call 'company union', where management, where the principal and the superintendent and the teachers are in the same organization and therefore the organization is incapable of representing the interests of teachers.

And for the most part, on a national basis teachers are still not involved in political action which is a key, of course. Education. Everything that happens in our public schools is politically controlled and if teachers are not involved and organized to any political action, then they're giving up the major areas in which they could have a very significant voice.

NEWMAN: Well, you have said, that if teachers were organized, they could be a major force in the social progress in the country. Let us assume that you, the overwhelming majority of teachers organized; let's assume, further, that they organized in one union--which is a matter we, I guess we ought to be talking about--but suppose they were, what social progress would you like to see brought about by teacher action?

SHANKER: Well, I would like to see teachers see the relationship between what happens in education and in other social institutions. That is, you know, it would be very nice and one of the things that--what teachers should fight for, of course would be things that would improve their own institution.

Universal early childhood education. Recent training programs for teachers so that they're not just dumped in after they finish college without any practical experience. An individual relationship with children, especially at a very early age. It's a very cruel thing to take a -- well, just think about the fact that a child of four or five is at home and is treated as an individual -- one, or two, or three, or four children at home by parents and then, all of a sudden, that child is put into a classroom with thirty where the children have to sit still from 8:40 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon, where they have to be quiet because if one child talks, then they all have a right to talk and if they all talk, why, that's thirty in one room and it's too noisy.

Now, if you or I took our children at home and had them sit still from 8:40 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon and to be quiet, why there'd be a little truck coming to pick us up from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

We have, essentially, a very inhumane factory type of system. Now, some children can take it. They're tough and they get through the school system and it's fine. But many children, when they're young, need more than that. They need someone that's going to hold them on their lap for a few minutes or someone who's going to sit next to them and just say, ' Johnny, would you read this for me?'

And that would make all the difference in the world.

Now, these are some of the things--by the way, I think if we've made that sort of an investment at a very early age,

we'd be able to save a tremendous amount of the money that we later have to spend in the social costs of the so-called rejects of our system.

Aside from that, no matter how individualized the instruction is, no matter how competent the teacher is, no matter how early we start with the child, if the child comes to school without clothing or can't come to school because they don't have any clothing -- if a child comes to school, without having had breakfast, if a child is living in a slum where they're freezing in the winter and sweltering in the summer and where the noise level and the violence and filth and disease that surrounds them is so great, that by the time a six year old comes to school, that person is no longer a child, because that person no longer has a dependent relationship on a grown-up. That six year old is taking care of a five year old and a four year old and a three year old and is going through all sorts of dangerous encounters.

Now, part of what I would hope is that teachers would see that they can't reach children. They can't fulfill their mission unless certain other things happen within society in terms of jobs and an end to discrimination and a certain standard of living.

Now, usually, teachers use this sort of a thing as a cop-out. You know, someone says, 'well, why aren't the kids learning?' and the teacher says, 'well, I can't solve all the problems of society.' That's the home. Or that's this. Or that's that.

But I don't think that teachers can just stand back and say -- it's not my fault. The next question is -- well, if it's the home, if it's poverty, if it's discrimination, if it's disease, what are you, as a teacher doing to help these people overcome that? And I think that's part of the role that teachers have to play within our society.

NEWMAN: But how would a teachers union do that? Through political action?

SHANKER: Through political action. We have seen in the last--

NEWMAN: You wouldn't be doing it through collective bargaining.

SHANKER: No. I think collective bargaining is an instrument that is limited to providing increases in salaries improvements in working conditions, a certain amount of democracy on the job, in terms of the grievance procedure. But I think that that is the key function of the union--to provide that. But once that is provided, any union that's worth its salt does much more than that. It goes beyond the narrow interests and it discovers the linkages between those narrow interests and other interes s.

Let me just, as an example of the kind of self-education that I've gone through myself and that I think many teachers have. A number of years ago we negotiated in our collective bargaining contract various health and welfare benefits for New York City teachers. They're very expensive. They include doctor costs and hospital costs and dental costs and major medical and disability and everything you can name is there.

But I don't think that teachers can just stand back and say -- it's not my fault. The next question is -- well, if it's the home, if it's poverty, if it's discrimination, if it's disease, what are you, as a teacher doing to help these people overcome that? And I think that's part of the role that teachers have to play within our society.

NEWMAN: But how would a teachers union do that? Through political action?

SHANKER: Through political action. We have seen in the last--

NEWMAN: You wouldn't be doing it through collective bargaining.

SHANKER: No. I think collective bargaining is an instrument that is limited to providing increases in salaries improvements in working conditions, a certain amount of democracy on the job, in terms of the grievance procedure. But I think that that is the key function of the union--to provide that. But once that is provided, any union that's worth its salt does much more than that. It goes beyond the narrow interests and it discovers the linkages between those narrow interests and other interests.

Let me just, as an example of the kind of self-education that I've gone through myself and that I think many teachers have. A number of years ago we negotiated in our collective bargaining contract various health and welfare benefits for New York City teachers. They're very expensive. They include doctor costs and hospital costs and dental costs and major medical and disability and everything you can name is there.

Now, many of these plans were-came into existence in 1967 and they're fine plans. But teachers in the city of New York today have poorer medical coverage than they did five, six, and seven years ago. Why?

Well, because with every increase in benefits that we got, there were tremendous escalation of costs in the medical world. And you begin to feel like a fool walking in each time. And you begin to realize that unless there is some form of comprehensive medical care that's planned by the government, that even teachers who are well off and who have a strong union are going to have a situation that's deteriorating.

Now, I think that we can--that teachers, through the union will find connections dealing with-starting with their interest in themselves. Their inability to find decent housing. What's happening with their own health plan. And I think that they will see that in--just in order to protect the gains that they get in their own collective bargaining contract, that they've got to get into social and political issues for themselves and for others who are not as fortunate in having a strong union or in making as much money.

NEWMAN: Is there any prospect that a teachers union or unions will be able to do what you'd like them to do--without a merger between the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association?

SHANKER: Well, we are now doing many of the things that I'm talking about--as we have been doing. And we have been involved

in trying to secure the passage of social legislation, aid to education, civil rights bills. We were very much involved in. We've been involved in the campaigns against the appointment of certain proposed Supreme Court justices. We've been involved. The real question is, obviously, that with four hundred and forty thousand concentrated mainly in urban areas of the country, we're obviously not as effective as we would be if we had eight hundred thousand or a million and during this period when education is threatened--not only the million and a half teachers who may be unemployed out there but there is a growing discontent with education in this country. We're about to go through a dangerous period, not just in terms of the decline of the birth rate and the fact that there will be a million and a half surplus teachers. But there's talk about privatizing the school system. About vouchers. The government giving a thousand or two thousand dollars to each parent and let teachers set up their own private schools. There's talk about letting corporations do it--performance contracting--let private companies handle these functions. There are all sorts of attacks on education today which didn't exist before.

NEWMAN: You're talking about attacks--excuse me--attacks on education or attacks on public education?

SHANKER: Well, I think they're largely attacks on public education because, for the most part, that is the educational system in this country. Now I think, by the way that the basic

reason for the attacks is that we've been so successful. When I grew up my parents would never attack the teachers of public schools, even if they were unhappy sometimes that they didn't have an education. They came from overseas; to them the public school system represented something that could give their children something that they and their parents and grandparents never had. There was this great educational distance between my parents and the teachers. They thought of themselves as--they were literate but they thought of themselves as uneducated and the teacher was cultured and educated and American and spoke English and so, there was this distance.

Well, the public schools have done such a great job that we now have a society not of immigrants but a society of doctors and lawyers and engineers and computer technologists all of whom look down at the teacher and feel that they could do a better job of raising their own children and educating their own children except that they're too busy making money in their other occupations. So we suffer, in a sense, from the problems of success which has ended that educational distance, that gap that existed.

NEWMAN: Isn't the - I see the argument, Mr. Shanker, but isn't a great deal of the dissatisfaction with the public schools among, not only middle class people, let me say, but among working class people who feel that the schools don't do for their children what they ought to do. That's one reason that we have a drive in New York City, for example, for community control. It wasn't a matter of these people feeling cause these were not computer technicians and they were not physicians and they were not

mathematicians and they were not engineers and executives. They were, by and large, poor people who were pressing for community control. Isn't that so?

SHANKER: Well, they weren't working people who were pressing for community control. I'd say that the, by and large, the working classes are still very satisfied with the public schools and view the public schools in the same way that the immigrants did previously, as an avenue of nobility for their children.

I think that there is dissatisfaction. There's dissatisfaction by the more well to do who feel that after the schools have taught their children how to read and write and count or perhaps those children learned at home before they ever got to school, that the school ought to be a very high quality place that develops culture and critical thinking and they are expecting it unfortunately of an institution which is modeled on a factory style. I think that the schools should do that but they're not able to do that when you-with all the burdens that are placed with the--massive--effort that each school and each teacher is involved in.

I think at the other end, there's great dissatisfaction with the very poor. With minority groups. Especially in terms of the discovery that in spite of the existence of schools all these years, that you still have disproportionate numbers of Puerto Ricans and blacks especially and very poor whites who still leave school as functional illiterates and just can't make it within society.

Now, here's a case where the school is being attacked for problems, that to a great extent are beyond the control of

the school. I believe the schools can do more and we're now involved in accountability programs and in very extensive research as to what it is that schools can do. But here we're dealing with very multiple problems, family, home, discrimination, housing: and I would say that the community control pressure was not really an educational pressure at all. It was essentially in the very poorest communities. Jobs weren't there. And essentially, they were saying that if we're not going to get integration, and if we're not going to get decent housing and if we're not going to get decent health care, at least give us our share of the government money you're spending here so we're going to kick out the people who are there, divide the money among ourselves and at least that will raise our economic status. It was a kind of an understandable cry of desperation--saying, we're just going to take a piece of whatever government institution is sitting next to us because we're in this horrible position. And I would say that as we enter the greater and greater unemployment in our country, there's going to be more and more of that. There will be more and more people in their community saying, well, if I've been laid off in my company or factory and I can't get a job there, then we Italians and the Irish and we blacks and we Jews and we Poles demand our share of jobs in the local school and the local post office and local police department and local fire department. It's essentially the kind of grab that takes place during a fire or a riot or something like that where everybody's in a

desperate situation and trying to grab something. I don't view it as educational. I view it as economic and I view it as political but I really don't know anyone who's made a good argument for saying that by having a bunch of local residents take over a school that education has improved or will improve.

NEWMAN: If the outlook is that gloomy, what is the prospect of a merger for your own purposes and your own protection, teachers' own protection between the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association?

SHANKER: I think that the prospects over the next three or four years are not good. Mainly because of the internal political problems of the National Education Association. They just changed their constitution. In the past they had a President--didn't amount of anything--President served for one year and each President was elected with a--a successor elected at the same time. Something like the President of a high school graduating class--in and out.

Now, that's changing. Their constitution now provides that the next President will serve for two years and can be re-elected for two more and still another two and until someone gets elected, that has a feeling of confidence that the membership supports that person, they're really in no position to sit down and negotiate with anybody else. If I had been elected with fifty-one percent of the vote, I wouldn't be in a position of being able to compromise with any other group and less votes in my own organization--I think, unfortunately, we're just going to have to wait this period of time.

NEWMAN: Now we were talking about unemployment among teachers. And you said that the way things are going now by the end of this decade there may be one unemployed teacher for every teacher who's employed. How did this come about? Why are the universities churning out all of these teachers? Aren't they aware of the fact that the market for teachers is no longer what it used to be?

SHANKER: Well, I guess it's hard for universities these days to figure out where the market will be if they're trying to think four or five or six years in advance. And they are exercising some controls but nevertheless, I guess they have not been able to overcome what mommy and daddy tells each child, which is, that if you want security go into teaching. And I guess, people have said that for so many years that it's believed.

Now, there needn't be an oversupply of teachers. If we do develop a universal, early childhood education program in this country, there are seventeen million children below the age of five who would need teachers. And if we were also - if we were to say that a teacher should have the same kind of training program that a doctor goes through which is that after you've taken your theoretical background you work as an intern. You don't have full responsibility to work with (SIGNAL MADE)...college graduate would spend two or three years with more experienced practitioners before taking over a classroom.

Then, if we went beyond that and said that we ought to provide teachers in prisons and hospitals or in homes for the elderly,

why not people who are finished with the day's work and they come, and instead of watching television, they might want to take one course one evening. If we have open enrollment now for high school students, why not open enrollment for workers who are finished at the end of the day's work?

If we were really to provide the equivalent of Medicare--educare, something for the mind which is universal equivalent, there wouldn't be an oversupply of teachers but if we continue to have the same kind of restrictive government policies, we're going to have serious problems.

Now, the problems won't really be for teachers. The teachers who have graduated now and cannot find a job teaching are not selling apples on street corners. They go into some sort of middle management jobs. They go into some store establishment and become sales manager or they do some copywriting or they do something else but what happens essentially is that they push out a level management which then takes a lower job and what happens at the end of this whole thing is that the people at the very bottom, with the poorest skills, every one is employed then in the system at a lower level than they were prepared for and at the bottom, you push out those with the lowest skills, then you have your five point four percent unemployment, again, concentrating heavily on blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, poor whites, the last to enter the system, those with the poorest skills at this time, which is what creates this great crisis.

NEWMAN: Mr. Shanker, you referred to the proposals for government giving parents vouchers, education vouchers, a

why not people who are finished with the day's work and they come, and instead of watching television, they might want to take one course one evening. If we have open enrollment now for high school students, why not open enrollment for workers who are finished at the end of the day's work?

If we were really to provide the equivalent of Medicare--educare, something for the mind which is universal equivalent, there wouldn't be an oversupply of teachers but if we continue to have the same kind of restrictive government policies, we're going to have serious problems.

Now, the problems won't really be for teachers. The teachers who have graduated now and cannot find a job teaching are not selling apples on street corners. They go into some sort of middle management jobs. They go into some store establishment and become sales manager or they do some copywriting or they do something else but what happens essentially is that they push out a level management which then takes a lower job and what happens at the end of this whole thing is that the people at the very bottom, with the poorest skills, every one is employed then in the system at a lower level than they were prepared for and at the bottom, you push out those with the lowest skills, then you have your five point four percent unemployment, again, concentrating heavily on blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, poor whites, the last to enter the system, those with the poorest skills at this time, which is what creates this great crisis.

NEWMAN: Mr. Shanker, you referred to the proposals for government giving parents vouchers, education vouchers, a

thousand dollars, two thousand dollars --whatever it may be-- which the parents would then be able to spend as they pleased in either public schools or private schools, seeking, at least theoretically, the best education their children could get, whether that was public or private.

The argument is made that this would establish standards by which private schools could be judged and by which public schools could be judged and that it would bring into the education field or at least give authority to establish schools to people who do not have such authority now and that we might find our educational system much better, that there would be greater variety, that there would be more experimenting, that there would be more specializing. And that parents, in effect would be able to shop around--what is the objection to that?

SHANKER: Well, the first place you go--a lot of variety now--there are seven hundred and sixty school districts in New York State. Across the country there are tens of thousands. So that there's plenty of room for variety and yet it's not there.

NEWMAN: That doesn't mean there's variety. That only means there's a large number.

SHANKER: Well, but you do have tens of thousands of separate school systems. And if the notion of having separate school systems or separate schools is what brings variety, we should have it now. We don't have very much variety because by and large what schools do is control-by the way teachers are trained and the textbooks that companies produce and the technology of the industry-in quotes--is what controls what happens.

But let me put it this way: We pay taxes for a public school system but not because we're trying to make Johnny or Mary earn ten and twenty thousand dollars a year but because if they aren't educated up to a certain level, then society pays a price and if they are educated, we all benefit--aside from the individual benefit that accrues to the person.

Now, if we're going to spend public funds, there must be public control. We don't want to use public funds to finance private schools that are going to be there for religious purposes. We don't want to do it if it's going to be schools that are going to develop ethnic and racial hostility. We certainly don't want to do it if it's just going to be a school to make private profit and it isn't living up to certain quality standards. So once you have this question of public funds, you must have public control or otherwise it's a giveaway.

Now, once you have the public control over these funds, wouldn't those controls include a certain minimum licensing standards for teachers? Wouldn't they include certain regulations for class size? Wouldn't they include certain textbooks that are acceptable and unacceptable?

Well, once you do that, haven't you re-established a series of standards which you expect all schools to live by, which is precisely what we have now? Now, if you don't do that, I maintain that you're giving away public money for private purposes. If you do it, what's the purpose of the vouchers?

I'd go a step further and say that if you don't just take one or two or three subjects, you know, if you see something small enough as an experiment, it will always work--if you could select five outstanding teachers and a hundred outstanding children and "x" number of outstanding families and a beautiful building and the right supplies, I'm sure that you'll have a marvelous school--but then we've got to get to the real world where if you're going to have three million teachers in this country, whether they're private school teachers or public school teachers, by and large they're going to teach the same way, whether they're teaching in this school or in that school.

Now, if you're talking about schools, schoolrooms that will house three million teachers, where are you going to get those schoolrooms? They're there right now and the only way you're going to get them into the private sector is to sell those buildings. Now, where are you going to get textbooks for all those children?

Well, they're there now. So when you talk about vouchers in a little school for an elite bunch of people who want to set up their own little experiment, that's great. But when you talk about vouchers as the program for the United States of America, then we're just kidding ourselves because basically you're talking about the same children attending the same buildings with the same three million teachers because there's not another three million, maybe in ten years, we'll have another one point five million waiting there. But the program is a hoax.

Now, essentially, there are a lot of private interests that would like to see vouchers--parochial schools would like it because they feel it's a way of getting money there. Southern racists feel that vouchers will be a way of getting public funding for racially separate schools. Black separatists would like it because it would be a way of developing black nationalist schools. Then you've got some of the New Left that believes what you've got to do is smash bureaucracies so people can take their few dollars and go across and be creative by setting up a little school in some garage. There may be some private industries that are interested because in a time of depression, they like to see a piece of the education dollar go into their industries. But the basic question we have to ask is whether this serves public policy in this country. Now, in spite of the criticisms that can be leveled against public education, this country was a nation of immigrants. many of them illiterate and if we look at what this nation has become within a very short period of historic time, a good deal of what has happened has to be credited to our public schools and to say that an institution which has served so well because it has not been able to solve a problem which no nation has been able to solve--the problem of how to educate the very poor who are also minorities within the society is a problem that has not been solved in Israel, it hasn't been solved in Europe. It hasn't been solved in the Soviet Union. It hasn't been solved in Africa. Every nation throughout the world has exactly the same problem.

So, essentially, what we're saying that at this point in time we have a disease for which as yet no cure has been found. And what we want to do is destroy all of our medical institutions which have--which cure many diseases--because they haven't found an answer to that one. It's now a reasonable approach.

NEWMAN: Mr. Shanker, you, yourself, how did you become a union organizer? You were, for a while, a mathematics teacher, teaching in a junior high school in New York. You became a union organizer. What let you into union activity?

SHANKER: Well, I came into teaching accidentally, at least, elementary and secondary teaching. I was working on a Ph.D. at Columbia University. My field was philosophy. I was interested mainly in ethics and metaphysics. And I guess I ran out of a couple of things. One was patience, in terms of doing my dissertation--and the other was money-- and I decided that I would teach for perhaps six months or a year and then I'd go back and eventually become a college professor.

And I started teaching in 1952 and I was very much impressed with two things. One was that here I was with everything completed for my Ph.D. except for the dissertation and I was earning two thousand, six hundred dollars a year, with a take home pay of about forty dollars a week. This was post-Korean War (sic) and the other thing that impressed me very much was the very absolute power of the principal and how teachers really shook-total authoritarian system and I became a volunteer in the school, together with

other teachers, we would sit during the lunch hour and talk about why aren't teachers organized, why don't we have a union, how can we let the principal talk to us that way, keep us for three hours or four hours at a faculty conference, read mimeographed notes to us and things like that?

And I worked for seven years as a volunteer, as all union members did at that time. There was only one paid employee of the union in New York City at that time. And so I got into it-- I would say, the other aspect of it, of course, is that I - my mother was an immigrant who was a member of both the Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and I grew up in a home where my mother would talk about working a seventy-five or an eighty hour week and working for five dollars a week and talking about the strikes that she had been through in the garment industry and what the unions had done and also the unions relationship to political action, especially during the Depression of the 30s when I grew up so that I had a political and social predisposition to unionism. And then my experiences on the job--I don't think it took one day before I realized that something was wrong and that what my mother had had in the factory for many years is something the teachers needed in the school.

NEWMAN: Where were you living when you were a boy?

SHANKER: Well, I was born on the Lower East Side. But I have no memories of that. We moved when I was very young and I lived in Long Island City most of my life--what is Queensboro Plaza area.

NEWMAN: You had some reasonably well-publicized experiences as a boy, I think, with where you-what might be called ethnic experiences, I suppose, in the jargon of today that you were a Jew living in an area where there were very few and you found this uncomfortable, didn't you?

SHANKER: Well, that's true but as I read the literature of the time, it was not an unusual experience. As I read through the years, the novels of James T. Farrell and others, why those were experienced by Italians who lived in Irish areas and Irish who lived in other areas and I happened to be Jewish living largely in Irish, somewhat Italian, mixed area, and there were constant ethnic hostilities and it was tough.

NEWMAN: Do you think the--what you call the ethnic hostilities were greater then than they are now? There seems to be a sort of an institutional ethnicity, if that's the word, terrible word--at large--

SHANKER: Well, I think there's been a resurgence. I think that there was a dying down of ethnicity during World War Two and around that period. I think that the tremendous wave of government education and propaganda as to what it is that Hitler was up to which made that sort of thing unpopular and in which there was a great belief in the melting pot and that as these last generations of immigrants after immigration had been cut off were becoming Americanized, that all this would change.

Now, in the last few years, we've had a great increase in ethnicity, starting, of course with the insistence on black studies and now the union has published a book on black studies--lesson

plans and also on Puerto Rican studies and in preparation are Italian studies and Jewish studies and others and I think that there is a certain plus to these things that as you read American History textbooks, the role of different people and I might say the role of the labor movement is totally missing in these books and the notion that each group ought to have an understanding of its contribution and pride in that contribution is fine. There are two things wrong with it. One is that a lot of this attempt to create pride is just fiction. It's like the Russians invented baseball and the Chinese invented base-every ethnic group is going to write its false history which I think is quite damaging. And the other is that we tend to forget that the one of the functions of our schools is to develop a common culture and pride in the fact that we do work and live together and not so much to emphasize our separateness. And I'm very worried that this resurgence of separateness, of this ethnicity is going to lead us to forget what the major function of our institutions is, which is to bring us together and not to pull us apart.

NEWMAN: You were left with no bitter feelings by your childhood. For example, there's a story about you that....

SHANKER: ...be nasty to others in that same sort of way. I can think when I was. It was part of the way of life. Others ganged up on me and there were times when I was part of a group that ganged up on others. And it was--it always seemed pleasant to be on the giving end and not on the receiving end.

NEWMAN: Mr. Shanker, let's talk a bit, if we may, about the prospect for public employees union or a unionization in the United States. Is the AFofL/CIO setting up a public employees department?

SHANKER: Yes. Such a department has been chartered by President Meany who was given that authority by the executive council under--there will be a founding convention of that group sometime this fall and it's my understanding that the initial membership in that group will be approximately two million.

NEWMAN: Who will be in it?

SHANKER: All AFL/CIO unions that have some members in the public sector. That includes groups like state carrying municipal employees and teachers and fire fighteres where it's all public sector or practically all public sector but it will include groups like the laborers and the service employees international union that have many members outside the public sector but come within the public sector.

NEWMAN: Well, is the labor movement changing? Obviously, it is but what I mean to say is, is it changing in such a way that power is going to reside with unions like yours to a much greater extent than before? You said, for example, that if all teachers were organized, or substantially all, you'd have more members than the Teamsters. I think you said, more members than the steel workers. You don't, of course, have the same tradition of militancy that some of the other unions have but is the time coming when we could expect preponderant power in the labor movement to be the exercise by white collar unions?

SHANKER: Well, that shift is taking place. I would hope that the organization of professional white collar people would stimulate further organization among blue collar people. I think, for instance that the organization of teachers in the South which is really just beginning--Florida, it's moving very quickly there will be collective bargaining in New Orleans within a month or two. I think that as some of the workers in the non-unionized factories down there, some of the textile factories take a look and see that teachers, fire fighters, psychologists and social workers are unionizing. I think that that's going to have an effect on private industry as well. I think there's no question that the reason teachers organized is that they thought that people in factories had a lunch hour whereas a teacher didn't. And they said, well, how are we different? We too have an employer and we've got money problems and working condition problems and we need a grievance procedure but it could very well go the other way. I don't--I see a community of interest between employees in the private--public sector. I think that there are some areas where we may need some lobbyists in order to see to it that we are included under labor legislation or included under minimum wage legislation or included under safety legislation or other bills where in the past public employees have been exempt. I think we have a need for some special research within the hour of public employment where you don't have problems of, you know industry competition and other things, the kinds of--the kinds of arguments used in negotiations are quite different. But

otherwise I believe that a separate organization of public employees would be an extremely dangerous thing. I think if public employees were to band together only for their own self-interests or higher salaries for public employees, higher pension for public employees, shorter hours for public employees and who's paying for all this? Why it's the public, everyone else who's working for a living and if(?) we, as public employees were(?) ever to say that we're interested only in it(?), we're going to start an organization only for ourselves and our own self-interest and we don't care about whether the rest of you have decent housing and whether you have pensions when you retire and whether you have a decent health plan or something else, I think that we would so isolate ourselves from the rest of society that there would be very repressive legislation. I think it would be very dangerous.

I think this is one of the reasons that I'm--I think--well, it's the major reason that I feel that the move that the National Education Association and State County and Municipal Employees have gone through this formation of a group called CAPE, the Coalition of American Public Employees is extremely dangerous. I think that public employees can only continue to have the support and confidence of the public insofar as they are not only for themselves and so far as they involve themselves in other things. Now the NEA has not even supported the grape workers strike, which, if there is an issue, in terms of poverty and exploitation in our society today, that that's one of them. Now, this, of

course, raises the question that as public employees get power like anybody else, they--it can be used in two ways--it can be used in a truly, a totally selfish way and if it is, it becomes destructive or it can be used to see what common interests they have with others.

NEWMAN: What about the right to strike, Mr. Shanker? That is something that many people would deny the public employees and, in fact, it is denied in some states. Can you--and it's certainly not expected of any employees of the federal government--how is that going to work--how effective can you be if you don't have the right to strike and if you don't occasionally strike?

SHANKER: Well, as you know, we do occasionally strike.

NEWMAN: Well, the teachers certainly do.

SHANKER: Yes. I think that here's a case where social policy in this country must change to conform with democratic policies and procedures in other countries. That the philosophy that exists throughout most government in the United States, state, local and national is essentially an old philosophy that comes out of the view that the servant may not strike against the sovereign or the king. We don't ask the question of whether the service is important, or what's really happening. It's automatically considered an act of rebellion. Well, you know, that's kind of silly because when the private bus companies go out on strike or New York City used to have private subways, that's perfectly legal. If the parochial and private schools go out on strike, that's legal.

But if the public subways, public schools go out on strike, why that's an act of rebellion and revolution.

I think, very simply, that is a democratic country, next to the right to vote and the right to speak out and assemble, the right to strike is perhaps the most important because you really can't do very much with your votes as an individual unless you collectively can band together and the right to have a union and to bargain collectively is a central right.

Now, I believe that if a strike endangers public health and safety, then society has a right to do something about it. Now, that strike doesn't have to be a public employees strike. Suppose that all food supplies were cut off from the city. All private power supplies were cut off.

On the other hand, suppose the fellow who sells newspapers in the municipal building decides to go out on strike and he happens to be a city worker, I think we need a sense of proportion and a sense of judgment in this whole thing and I think that all workers in a free society should be permitted to strike so long as that strike does not present a danger to health and safety and that is the policy followed in Canada and England and Israel and other societies that are democratic. And, unfortunately, the kind of laws that put me in jail twice, have put other strikers here in the public sector in jail, these are laws that are closer to the laws of Iron Curtain countries. Of course, they're much more lenient. If I did this in the Soviet Union I wouldn't be sitting here talking today, I would be gone. But they're repressive and they're wrong and they have no place in a society like ours.

NEWMAN: How much time did you spend in jail?

SHANKER: Twice--

NEWMAN: All told.

SHANKER: Twice--twice for fifteen days.

NEWMAN: Fifteen days each?

SHANKER: Each.

NEWMAN: What was it like?

SHANKER: Quite unpleasant. Although the major unpleasantness is being shut off from your work and your family and your colleagues.

NEWMAN: You were in a cell, were you?

SHANKER: No. It was a--

NEWMAN: Barracks?

SHANKER: --dormitory.

NEWMAN: Dormitory.

SHANKER: And it was interesting. It was used to be called The Alimony Jail but most of the people who were there were not there for nonpayment of alimony. Most of them were material witnesses in murder cases and they are people who are kept there supposedly because they're needed as witnesses but actually they're frequently kept there as a way of getting them to talk. And the joke in the jail was that if each one of them said, if I had only committed the murder, I'd be out on bail now. Since I'm only a material witness, here I am locked up.

NEWMAN: Mr. Shanker, your personality has come to be - your person has come to be a matter of some interest to people, partly because you are alleged to run things with something of

an iron hand in the union, also because you're supposed to have perhaps a very bright future in the labor movement, maybe(?) to be going a good deal higher. On question I would like to put to you about all of that: It used to be traditional in the labor movement that union officials didn't get much more money than the union members made. In fact, I think at one time, you were in a position in a union which had a rule that the head of the union couldn't get more than three thousand dollars more than any union member. And I think your salary is now seventy thousand dollars a year. Is that a good thing for the labor movement?

SHANKER: Well, I suppose it has its good and its bad aspects. The bad one is obvious-is that there is obviously a certain separation of leader from the membership in that situation. I started, by the way, working for the union at exactly the salary that I made as a teacher and did for a number of years. On the other hand, most unions have found that you can't keep competent union leaders at those salaries because they get offers from management and elsewhere which are very attractive and most of the members will take those offers. And so, in those unions where the salary of the union leader is the same as that of the members, why--and that's--well, there are teacher leaders across the country who last as head of the teacher union for one or two years and then the following year, they're the Superintendent of Schools. And the same thing has happened in industry where, if the union doesn't recognize that problem, a fellow who would be head of

the union becomes the head of labor relations for the steel company or for the oil company or for the clothing manufacturer or somebody else.

Now the other thing is that I think that if you took the number of--if you took the hourly wage of the teacher in New York City and if you took the number of hours that a teacher works which is beyond a school day and if you took the number of hours that I work, I think that I work at a salary pretty close to the hourly rate that a teacher in New York City at maximum makes over twenty thousand dollars a year and I work Saturdays and Sundays and evenings and pretty much around the clock.

At any rate, I think that's a decision for the members of the union to make and they're the ones who vote on it and they're the ones who have the final decisions on it.

NEWMAN: I should give you a chance to answer what--to comment on the other things I said, for example, people describe you as being obsessed with power and of there being no right to dissent in your union; you're aware of these criticisms. Do they trouble you?

SHANKER: Well, I'm not obsessed with power but a union is an instrument for power. Each teacher or each worker is a very weak person and doesn't have very much power. The reason you have a union is because you want power; you want to get rid of the powerlessness that you have as an individual. That's not an obsession. That's the basic purpose of the organization. Now, as far as dissent within the organization, people run against me. There are political parties. There are caucuses.

I go out of my way to recognize the opposition at every meeting. But it's true that when I win and so far I have won and a slate of candidates wins with me, I do exactly what any candidate does. When Nixon won, he did not appoint Hubert Humphrey to run the government for him. And when Johnson won, he did not appoint Barry Goldwater to run the country for him. And when I win an election, I respect the right of dissidents to speak out; they can distribute literature, they can run against me but they're not hired to operate the union during that period of time. Now, in that respect, I'm no different from anybody else who's in political life.

NEWMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Shanker.

Albert Shanker has been speaking freely.

Edwin Newman, NBC News.